City of Santa Barbara
Parks and Recreation Department

Memorandum

DATE: February 15, 2012

TO: Creeks Restoration/Water Quality Improvement Program Citizen Advisory Committee

FROM: George Thomson, Creeks Planner

SUBJECT: **Laguna Channel & Mission Lagoon Restoration Project Preliminary Design**

COMMITTEE DIRECTION – FOR ACTION

That the Committee receive a presentation on the Laguna Channel and Mission Lagoon Restoration Project and recommend that Council award a professional services contract to conduct the necessary technical studies and design work.

DISCUSSION

Project Purpose & Current Status

The Laguna Channel and Mission Lagoon Restoration Project ("Project") is intended to improve water quality and wildlife habitat in one of the City's most visible coastal wetlands (see Figures 1-5), while also fulfilling additional goals identified during community meetings with various interested parties. The Project goals include the following:

- Improve Water Quality
- Improve Native Plant and Wildlife Habitat
- Maintain or Improve Flood Control
- Protect Surrounding Infrastructure
- Maintain and Support Existing Uses
- Improve Aesthetics
- Ensure Public Safety
- Ensure Consistency with Existing Projects, Plans, Permits, Laws, and Policies

Five teams of consulting firms submitted proposals to complete technical analyses, conceptual design, and preliminary design of the Project. The City conducted interviews with three finalists and a top team, led by ESA PWA, was chosen via a "Qualifications-Based Selection" process. This process requires public agencies to select a project design consultant based solely on their professional qualifications, rather than on the cost of their services alone. The City is currently in contract negotiations with ESA PWA. The final contract price is expected to be between

$600,000 and $700,000. The City Council will have the opportunity to authorize the execution of this contract in March.

Project Site Background

Mission Creek and Laguna Channel flow to the Pacific Ocean at East Beach, immediately southeast of the intersection of State Street and Cabrillo Boulevard. The two creek mouths often join to form a beach lagoon that typically opens to the Pacific Ocean during large winter storms. During calmer weather a sand bar naturally re-forms on the beach to close the lagoon mouth to the ocean. The ponded water creates a unique habitat that supports two endangered fish species (tidewater goby and southern steelhead) and numerous migratory birds. Despite its prime location along Santa Barbara's waterfront and the presence of unique wildlife species, Mission Lagoon suffers from poor water quality, low plant diversity, and a generally poor appearance.

Adjacent to Mission Lagoon is Laguna Channel, a highly urbanized creek that was once part of an extensive estuary covering the eastern portion of the city. The estuary was mostly filled in and developed following the 1925 earthquake. Currently, a set of tide gates and a high capacity pump station on the bank of Laguna Channel serve as an important Public Works facility that reduces flooding of areas upstream. The structure of the flood control facility and adjacent channel is currently in need of repair and will eventually require a major renovation. Below the pump station, Laguna Channel supports some degraded wetland habitat, but it is mostly disconnected from Mission Lagoon by the tide gates.

The City's Public Works Department is required to restore the western portion of Mission Lagoon to mitigate the environmental impacts associated with the Cabrillo Boulevard Bridge replacement over Mission Creek and the Lower Mission Creek Flood Control Project. The Mission Lagoon and Laguna Channel Restoration Project will not modify the plans already approved for the western portion of Mission Lagoon and the Lower Mission Creek Flood Control Project.

Scope of Work

The Project design consultant is proposing to complete technical analyses, conceptual design, and preliminary design. The technical analyses will determine the existing physical conditions of the Project area in order to determine the constraints and opportunities of possible Project components. No Project plans currently exist. A conceptual plan that best fulfills the Project goals will be developed after the constraints analyses are completed. Public meetings will then be held to gather input on the conceptual plan. After the public review of the conceptual design, the consultant team will refine the Project plan and develop a preliminary design that will undergo further public review and technical feasibility analysis.

The development of a restoration plan for the channelized section of Mission Creek located upstream of the Lagoon at the Railroad Depot is also included in the Project (see Figure 5). A potential restoration plan for this area would leave the channel walls intact and restore the creek bed to a natural state. The consultant team, in coordination

with the Public Works Department and Santa Barbara County Flood Control District, will determine if this outcome is technically feasible.

Timeline

City Council will have the opportunity to authorize the execution of the contract to PWA ESA in March pending a successful city staff negotiation with PWA ESA on the contract price. If City Council authorizes the contract, PWA ESA will begin work on the technical analyses in April. The entire preliminary design process and public review is expected to take two years.

cc: Cameron Benson, Creeks Restoration/Clean Water Manager
Jill Zachary, Assistant Parks and Recreation Director
Karl Treiberg, Waterfront Department Facilities Manager
Pat Kelly, Assistant Public Works Director/City Engineer
John Ewasiuk, Public Works Department Principal Civil Engineer
Brian D'Amour, Public Works Department Supervising Engineer
Jessica Grant, Public Works Department Project Planner